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Duane Hopwood

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I watched *Duane Hopwood* tonight. Ever heard of it? It’s a low-key indie film starring David Schwimmer. You know, Ross from *Friends*? Schwimmer plays the titular character; he drinks too much and loses his wife because of it. He has two daughters, and he’s a wonderful father, but he makes some bad decisions over the course of the movie that drive the plot forward. The character is wonderful. The acting is wonderful. Schwimmer nails the performance and, physical appearance aside, in no way resembles his legendary character from the popular sitcom.

Aside from *Friends*, I had only seen Schwimmer in two other roles, only one of which I will discuss here: a secondary character in a Harrison Ford film my brother Sam and I rented... well, because Harrison Ford was in it. Schwimmer’s character there was a lot like Ross in his mannerisms, if not his likeability; he was obviously cast so as to be the less appealing romantic candidate for the lead heroine than the eminently more dashing (and older) Mr. Ford.

After watching *Six Days, Seven Nights* (I looked the title up on IMDB), Sam expressed his dislike for the Ross actor: “He always plays the same role. He was cast in this movie to be un-likeable!” Both avid *Friends* fans, he told me once, contemplatively, “I guess my two least favorite characters are Ross and Monica, the Geller siblings.”

I, however, have always been deeply attached to Ross. Maybe it’s because Rachel (Jennifer Aniston) was the first woman I ever saw that made me think, “Wow!” I thought she was superbly beautiful even before I liked girls. Hell, I disliked Princess Leia simply because she was a girl (I was ten), but I still thought Rachel was hot. I didn’t even know what sex was, but I sure liked Rachel Green!

I think I like Ross because he loves Rachel. And Rachel loves him. And gosh darn it, the whole damn world knows that they’re meant to be together. They’re the leads! Sure, Monica and Chandler are great together, and Phoebe scored a winner when she married Mike, and I love Eric’s hot red-headed neighbor as much as anyone (different sitcom, I know), but Ross and Rachel are the definitive romance. They are Antony and Cleopatra without empires to lose and asps to bite their breasts. They are John Crichton and Aeryn Sun without the spaceship and the pulse pistols. They were born to be with one another.

Sam knew that I love Ross. I recorded a song once with the lyric, “I am watching another comedy/And I wish that they were you and me/The romantic leads;” he knew immediately which romantic leads I was thinking of. While I was home for Christmas 2010, Sam and I watched “The One with the Lesbian Wedding,” and there’s this scene where Carol’s father isn’t there to give her away to Susan, so Ross, her ex-husband, walks her down the aisle in his place. Sam told me, “That is so something you would do. You would walk your lesbian ex-wife to marry another man.”

“Thanks Sam. I’m sure that will happen to me at some point in my life.” I wasn’t even being sarcastic when I said that.

Ever since then, I have thought of myself as Ross. I’m awkward, moderately attractive, I’ll never make as much money as he does, but I’ve got the biggest heart this side of a Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup on Valentine’s day, and that seals the deal. I am Ross. I just haven’t met my Rachel.

I have spent 500 words detouring from my point—my first thought after watching *Duane Hopwood* was that I should tell Sam he needs to watch it, because it proves that David Schwimmer can act, that he can act well, and that he has been unfairly typecast since *Friends* went off the air.

That thought only lasted a millisecond before I realized that Sam was dead. It changed to, ‘I wish Sam was still alive, so I could watch this movie with him. Then I could show him I was right all along.’ Sometimes, I have those moments. I forget that he’s dead. They’re rare, and they die sooner that a fruitfly, but they happen. It’s been over a year now since Sam died. I’ve never dealt with it properly. I tried to go back to school, but I was too emotional to give a damn. I spent an entire summer lying around on the couch watching Netflix, doing everything in my power not to think about...
him. I went to counseling for a while, and it helped, but after a while I roadblocked and didn't process anything. Six months ago, I wrote a mini-memoir about him in a much more compelling format than the present one, and I thought a curtain had fallen; I'd finished my mourning and I was ready to get back to living.

But two weeks ago, I realized that I'm still pretty badly fucked. I close my eyes and I see his body swaying over the river, his neck snapped, the rope wrapped tight around his throat, his body dangling like a motherfucking noodle, limp and cold and white. I never saw his body after the incident; but my imagination, usually stagnant, is pretty fucking vivid in this respect.

Jesus tells us, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." But I can't give my pain to God. I point blank refused in the middle of a prayer. "I'm not ready to give this to you Lord. I need to hang on to it. This is my pain! It's tearing me to hell, driving me to sin, and frelling with my mind, but I can't let it go."

The truth is, deep in my heart, I wish that I had died instead of Sam. I wish to God that I had. God had a different will, but there it is. Thinking about Sam brings me so much damn pain. I don't know how to process it, I can't figure out what to make of it, so I just don't think about it. I lock it away like an old-fashioned fool, and I do my damn best not to bring it up.

But a shadow and a threat has been growing in my mind, and it came to light two weeks ago. By ignoring Sam's memory, my brain has started to delete it. When I try to think about him, memories don't float to the surface. They stay trapped under the ice. It's hard for me to remember the adventures we went on together, and we spent eighteen years embarking upon them!

That is unacceptable.

I must not forget Sam's life. I must not cease living because I'm too damn frightened to face my horror.

The only thing more horrifying than the image of Sam's body blowing in the wind is the thought of forgetting that image.

So I watch Friends.

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**FDR Memorial**

*Casey Fuller*

Before they were statues;
before they were shadows;
before there was a wall
and a sidewalk and a door;

before promises were made
and they looked to a future;
before they were four men from
small towns and one from Chicago;

before there was a Chicago
and the trains that brought them;
before they thought of being brought
and before they thought of anywhere;

before they were men instead of
statues and before they were bronzed;
before they were photos a sculptor
used to work from and before they

seemed similar and could simply be
called poor; before they could be
summmed up and described on this paper;
before they had boots, before they

had hats, before they had their hands
in their pockets and arms—they were just
men, without a history, lost, waiting forever
to fall into line.